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THE USE OF SCIENTIFIC MATERIAL IN THE HIGH-SCHOOL COURSE IN ENGLISH¹

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About a year and a half ago the suggestion arose in a meeting of high-school principals of northeastern Illinois that the content of the study books used in the high-school course in English was somewhat limited. The belief was expressed that the curriculum would be improved if the literature studied in one class included four fields of literature rather than one. It was suggested that we have a year devoted to the study of poetry and belles-lettres, a second year to the study of scientific material, and a third year to historical material. The English teachers of the J. Sterling Morton High School felt that, if this plan were followed precisely, the pupils would be surfeited during the first year with one, and during the next year with another, kind of material, as they now are throughout each of the four years in most high schools.

Hence, a modification of the original suggestion was worked out by our English teachers. Our high-school year, like that of many other high schools, is divided into two semesters. The study books of our former English course were one or two for each semester, and all of them from that class of literature which may be called artistic writing, or, as many term it, literature. This you all recognize as the usual quantity in the English dietary in high schools. The first change that we made was to increase the number of classics studied from one to two a semester to four for each semester. In the second place, instead of devoting the study to one field, according to the ukase of the college-entrance list, we planned to cover four fields of literature, viz., fiction, history, science, and poetry and belles-lettres.

¹Read in the English Section of the Educational Conference with Secondary Schools, Chicago, April 18, 1913.

Our list of study books now is as follows:

FIRST YEAR

FIRST SEMESTER

FICTION

Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*
Dickens, *Dombey and Son*

HISTORY

Franklin, *Autobiography*
Bryant, *Ulysses*

POETRY

Arnold, *Sohrab and Rustum*
Bryant, *Selections*

SCIENCE

Burroughs, *Birds and Bees*
Burroughs, *Sharp Eyes and Other Papers*

SECOND SEMESTER

FICTION

Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*
Scott, *Ivanhoe*

HISTORY

Parkman, *Oregon Trail*
Irving, *Alhambra*

POETRY

Lowell, *Vision of Sir Launfal*
Browning, *Selections*

SCIENCE

Burroughs, *Squirrels and Other Fur-Bearers*
Burroughs, *Afoot and Afloat*

SECOND YEAR

FIRST SEMESTER

FICTION

Blackmore, *Lorna Doone*
Hawthorne, *House of Seven Gables*

HISTORY

Parkman, *Conspiracy of Pontiac*
Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*

POETRY

Shakespeare, *As You Like It*
Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*

SCIENCE

Higginson, *Three Out Door Papers*
Lyell, *Travels in America*

SECOND SEMESTER

FICTION

Scott, *The Talisman*

Scott, *Quentin Durward*

HISTORY

Lincoln-(Tarbell), *Speeches and Writings*

Brown, *Epoch Making Papers in United States History*

POETRY

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Shakespeare, *Henry V*

SCIENCE

Tyndall, *Glaciers of the Alps*

Burroughs, *A Bunch of Herbs and Other Papers*

THIRD YEAR

FIRST SEMESTER

FICTION

Eliot, *Silas Marner*

Thackeray, *Henry Esmond*

HISTORY

Fiske, *Critical Period of American History*

Motley, *Peter the Great*

POETRY

Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*

Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

SCIENCE

Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*

Thoreau, *Katahdin and Chesuncook*

SECOND SEMESTER

SCIENCE

Huxley, *Lay Sermons*. L. 25

Darwin, *Earth Worms*. R. 25

POETRY

Milton, *Minor Poems*. R. 15

Milton, *Paradise Lost*. R. 15

HISTORY

Macauley, *Warren Hastings*. Me. 12

Macauley, *Chatham*. 9. 15

ESSAY

Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*. R. 15

Thoreau, *Walden*. L. 25

FICTION

Hugo, *Ninety Three*. B. 45

Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*. L. 25

The study books of the fourth year are omitted from this list because the year's work is planned to be as far as possible a duplication of the course in the history of English literature, which is usually given the first year in college. All pupils who are preparing for college are excused, as a rule, from the fourth-year work in English. Because of the press of the college-entrance requirements in the other departments, it is not usually advisable for a pupil who is preparing for college to take more than three years of English. All pupils who are not looking forward to a college course are required to take fourth-year English work. In this course, however, since it is our effort to make it a replica of the English course in college, there are inevitably no science books.

It will be noted that there are, in this course of three years, twelve titles from that field of literature called science. Many of these works are short; some of them have been used, perhaps, by teachers in the grades.

The first great benefit that comes from the injection of such books into the course is that the English teachers find that there is literature other than poetry and belles-lettres; the second that he must not only read but study in new fields and thus he will be broadened. The pupil at once finds that there are new points of contact in literature. Before, literature always meant to him poetry or some other fine writing which had little to do with the material of the world. Now he makes the acquaintance of some very interesting material. Thus interest is quickened in the world about him, and he is thus more interested in his English work.

A very significant fact in regard to this change is that the pupils like it and do the work with much enthusiasm. High-school pupils are alert for anything which appeals to them as practical. Every English teacher has discussed the English course with the pupils—especially with the boy who “hates English,” abhors theme-writing, and sees no use in the study of poetry and the so-called classics. And every teacher has found himself somewhat baffled in his efforts to convince this boy that his English work is worth while. In many cases he hears incorrect English in the home from the father who stands for everything worth while in his opinion. Perhaps the father is inclined to think that we are wasting time when we devote many days to a book of which he has not heard.

The tastes of many of our young people have not been trained so that they appreciate the great things in literature; poetry is a sealed book to them.

It is far from our purpose to step down to the level of these boys and girls, or to lower our standards in the slightest degree. But it is our purpose to broaden our course—to place it beyond the criticism that we are narrow and inclined to draw close, hard lines excluding the great field of subjects which attract the practical young person. The argument that appeals to the pupil is that which shows how his English work is going to be of use to him. To tell him that what he needs when he gets out into the world is the ability to *talk*—to talk on many subjects, to be able to say what he has to say in clear concise English, to answer questions intelligently, to give directions briefly, to meet any situation with poise and readiness—this appeals to him in the light of a possession having a financial value. In this day of vocational interest, the work in English must point to a definite aim with a real value.

And that is what a broad range of books read in the English class accomplishes. The classics alone which have made up the entire course seem to the pupil to be an arbitrary selection from one field—a barring of much that is good and useful simply because it is not found in a certain list of selected books. Is there nothing of modern everyday interest that can be read? Are the interesting books in other fields—scientific, industrial, social, and commercial—not a part of English? When the wide-awake boy or girl is led to read rapidly and to discuss what he reads freely he feels that he is doing something quite worth while. This was recently illustrated in a class that was reading Professor Tyndall's *Glaciers of the Alps*. The assignments were planned to cover sixty minutes of continued reading, with a small allowance for necessary reference to the dictionary but none for detailed work. The pupils were asked to note pages where there were good descriptions, figures of speech, or anything which they noticed during the one reading of the book. In this reading the boys and girls responded with a remarkably keen appreciation of Professor Tyndall's work, calling attention to vivid word pictures and getting real enjoyment from the account.

For the teacher, this change means a great deal. He must

be awake and alert for new fields. He will find himself broadening in his thinking, and instead of being limited to the classics of the old days, he will plunge into new material. As English is used in every other department of the school, so will the scope of the other departments become a field of investigation of the English room.

Not only scientific and industrial material, but reading along all lines is used, so that the scope of home reading and the class study covers a wide territory—modern science, modern drama, books on social conditions, political economy, biography of men and women successful in various fields of the world's activities of present-day interest.

Class reports from the *Survey*, reviews of the Peace Foundation, investigations of industrial conditions in Chicago, and then in more remote fields—all these awaken an interest in the world of today and develop a spontaneous easy use of the English language. Each member of a third-year class was recently given a copy of the Peace Foundation and two days were devoted to reviews of the articles. Each pupil stood before the class and spoke with only such notes as could be written on one side of a four by five card. The result was interesting in several ways, in the use of the English language, the spontaneity of expression, the class interest, and the questions which followed the report. Such use is made of all available material. The value of such work is unquestionable. The difficulty lies in the fact that material is not available. Books which would serve the purpose are not published in editions which are within our reach financially. When the pupils are required to purchase at least eight books and sometimes more each year, inexpensive books must be secured. It is a deplorable fact that we are handicapped in our work because of the lack of such editions. However, we have much that is within our reach. The director of the Thomas Hughes Reading Room of the Chicago Public Library has been untiring in her efforts to help pupils find material for oral and written work.

Every effort is made to prepare the pupils to rely on their own resources. They are accustomed to conduct the class, draw out points of interest by questioning each other. The object is to reduce the amount of talking done by the teacher to a minimum and to give the boys and girls the best that we can in preparation for life.